16.0 Ten-year Master Plan for Fire Service Delivery

This chapter of the report contains major recommendations based on Manitou, Inc.'s analysis and the scope of work for the study. This report attempts to distinguish between "strongly recommended" and "optional" recommendations where possible. We understand that any decisions will require deliberation by the Task Force and possibly, public participation.

These changes are designed to maintain or improve the current level of service within the area served by the five fire districts. As we indicated, there is not a need for major additional resources; through improved efficiency and greater cooperation between districts, we believe that additional resources can be identified to support those items that will require more emphasis.

16.1 Administrative Changes

Many of the most critical changes necessary are administrative in nature. This is arecognition of the structure of fire districts in New York State and the need to collaborate within the legal confines of the fire district structure. One of the most obvious ways to deal with these legal barriers between organizations is to consider consolidation. Consolidation was not included in the scope of this study, although it will be discussed later. Most importantly, consolidation is not a cure-all, and many steps can be taken to achieve these goals short of consolidation.

The discussion of administrative changes takes place beginning with governance and follows into specific policy recommendations.

16.1.1 Governance and Organization

The only formal organization that currently exists within the Town of Bethlehem's fire services is the Town of Bethlehem Volunteer Fire Officer's Association (TOBVFOA). The TOBVFOA consists of the fire departments and rescue units within the Town of Bethlehem and the Albany County ALS program. (Coeymans Fire Department officers have been invited to attend the meetings this year.) In order to be a member in this association, one must be a line/district officer or a commissioner in his/her fire department, an officer in his/her rescue unit, or must have been elected to life membership in the association. Any officer elected to one of the positions previously described shall automatically become a member of this association. Member organizations are assessed annual dues of three hundred dollars ($300.00). Individual members are not assessed dues. The officers of the TOBVFOA consist of a president, vice president, secretary/treasurer and a sergeant-at-arms. Regular meetings of this association are held on the first Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. except in December, when the meeting is held on the second Thursday at the same time. The TOBVFOA lists the following objectives in the *Constitution and Bylaws* of the association:

- To form and maintain a mutual aid standby system for the Town of Bethlehem.
- To improve the radio and central dispatch systems.
- To provide and encourage compliance with the New York State/local fire codes.
- To provide and establish training programs and provide and maintain a training facility(s) for the use of all districts within the Town of Bethlehem.

- To foster better relationships between fire departments/rescue units within the Town of Bethlehem and the County of Albany.
- To protect life and property during any fire/rescue emergencies within the Town of Bethlehem.
- To strive for better public relations and awareness and to provide a fire prevention program.
- To provide and maintain a breathing air tank bank for the Town of Bethlehem.
- To implement and maintain a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) plan for the Town of Bethlehem.

This organization has been behind many efforts at improved collaboration among the fire districts over the years. Its structure is more suited to a fraternal purpose, and participation among formal leaders of departments has varied in recent years. The group is run very informally, and written minutes have not been circulated over the past year. This is not to criticize the group but to point out that its structure originated in a time of slower change and less structured cooperation between the districts.

Recommendation 16.1: Make the Task Force a permanent group, with a voting membership. A high-level structure will be essential to effective and timely decision making for the numerous recommendations contained in this report. The TOBVFOA can continue in its role, but should not be the lead body for decision making. The TOBVFOA continues to serve a useful purpose for consultation.

Recommendation 16.2: Move toward a goal of functional consolidation, meaning that departments and districts maintain their legal structure and identities but pursue efforts to coordinate service delivery and operations seamlessly. This program should work towards the following objectives:

1. Radio designations
2. Helmet markings and designations
3. Safety-related fireground policies
4. All fireground policies
5. Standardization of equipment locations on apparatus
6. Standardization of training requirements
7. Standardization of apparatus design
8. Move toward closest station response to emergencies

Recommendation 16.3: Although not explicitly contained in our scope of work, we believe that movement toward consolidation is reasonable and timely. The degree of integration between districts would be greatly aided through consolidation, which would ease governance. However, our analysis indicates that consolidation would simplify efforts to manage collective resources and would likely ease decisions on allocation of apparatus and future investments in facilities.

We see two steps that need to be made if consolidation is a goal. First, we believe that the town's five districts could be reduced to two: one consisting of the current Elsmere and Selkirk Fire Districts; the second consisting of the Delmar, Elmwood Park, and Slingerlands Fire Districts. If

these consolidations were achieved, it might be worthwhile to consider (in 5-10 years) a further consolidation between these two larger districts to form a Townwide district.

However, a considerable amount of the benefits of consolidation can be achieved through greater cooperation leading to a functional integration of operations. Contention over the questions of consolidation should not impede pursuit of the other recommendations within this report.

Recommendation 16.4: Work to better integrate Elmwood Park Fire District into the Town of Bethlehem fire service system. The Elmwood Park Fire District feels marginalized in the Town of Bethlehem. Their dispatch relationship with the Town of Guilderland places them closer to the Town of Guilderland. The majority of their district is in the Town of Bethlehem, however, and further efforts should be made to integrate the Elmwood Park district into the town.

16.1.2 Staffing Utilization

As shown in the analysis, a significant portion of district members live closer to the station of another district. This pattern indicates a potential for better utilization of personnel if districts could find a way to allow members of other Districts to serve in a broader geography, either through automatic aid policies or through eventual consolidations.

Recommendation 16.5: The Glenmont area is a glaring example of the current system hindering effective use of resources. The Selkirk station is closest to much of this area, but the Elsmere Fire District is first-due in much of the area, even though it has longer than average response times due to its distance from their station. The Elsmere Fire District engine that is currently housed at Delmar Station 2 is set to be moved out, further exacerbating the problem. This is a prime area where a closest station response policy makes sense.

A closest-station response policy may raise questions about tax revenues and workload for both districts affected, especially if there is an imbalance in aid. We do not necessarily see this as the case here.

Recommendation 16.6: For daytime staffing, there are 27 Town of Bethlehem employees who are active volunteers with one of the five fire districts. This suggests that management of this resource, particularly in the context of sharing manpower, should be addressed. Using these personnel through expanded automatic aid could achieve one to two crews to staff apparatus on a routine basis while leaving a considerable number of employees at their jobs. Further study on the utilization and release policy for town employees should be done. One could envision an engine actually parked at Town Hall or another location where a critical mass of town employees are located and staffed as needed.

Recommendation 16.7: Given the limits of staffing, especially during daytime hours, a movement toward a “single-pull” system, whereby each station is responsible for staffing a single apparatus, is a possibility. The benefits of such a system are that it gets more apparatus on the street more quickly, and shares the workload between multiple stations. Based on monitoring of turn-out times, this policy could be fine-tuned to recognize stations that consistently staff multiple pieces of apparatus by time of day.

Recommendation 16.8: Evaluate dispatch assignments to efficiently use personnel and equipment. This includes considerations for reducing the amount of apparatus to be sent on automatic alarm activations in small residential properties or frequent false alarm locations, and balancing automatic aid policies to achieve a more uniform response to incidents in terms of personnel and apparatus.

16.1.3 Future Equipment and Facility Needs

The amount of apparatus in the Town is more than adequate given the needs to protect its residents against fire. While we do not see extreme examples of excess apparatus purchases, the difference in planning from a single district perspective versus looking from a town-wide perspective leads one to choices for reductions in the quantity of apparatus. In the long term, these reductions will lead to reduced taxes by avoiding debt service or the need to build up capital reserves at the same pace.

The current stations are not ideally located, nor are they without need for future renovation or expansion. Several facilities have been renovated, extending the useful life of the buildings. However, limitations such as "too-small" apparatus bays are common, and will need to be addressed in the future. Most of the stations will remain serviceable for the near future. One tactic for extending the life of these facilities is to reduce the amount of apparatus housed in them. Some consolidation of administrative space would permit future stations to be smaller and avoid the costs of building five headquarters stations in the future.

Although the existing fire station locations are not ideal, they are adequate. The only two stations that are poorly located are Delmar Station #1 and the Elsmere Fire District, which are too close to each other. Given that both stations have been renovated recently, we do not foresee any point in suggesting that either of them be abandoned or a new station constructed in the 10-year planning horizon. The costs of a new station (barring a facility in dire need of replacement) will far outweigh the savings from reduced costs of operation in most cases.

Recommendation 16.9: The apparatus fleet in the town can be reduced over time, primarily by re-deploying or not replacing apparatus as they age. Ideally, this process would be driven by the districts working together. This process must account for staffing levels at the candidate sites for any redeployment. Consider the proficiency of members in maintenance and operation of specialty apparatus. Planners must recognize that volunteer time is limited, and training requirements and maintenance of proficiency in areas such as ladder operations, heavy rescue, and hazardous materials is time consuming. A critical cadre of trained personnel must be maintained and demonstrate their ability to respond. The call volumes for these services are low, which requires a greater emphasis on training. Some respect for the traditional specializations of districts should be granted in this analysis.

A few guiding principles are:

- Reduce apparatus where staffing levels are consistently unable to operate it.
- Reduce or redeploy specialty apparatus when there is overlap
- Reduce spare apparatus to create a town-wide pool of reserve apparatus consistent with the ISO schedule.

To manage this process, we would strongly suggest that the Task Force collectively determine an apparatus replacement plan looking across all Districts, and by setting public targets for reductions to the apparatus fleet along with plans for how these targets will be met through retirement of apparatus or placement of apparatus into reserve status. In some cases, it may be most efficient to move excess apparatus from one District to another to avoid or defer the cost of purchasing replacement apparatus.

16.2 "Blank-Slate" Station and Apparatus Plans

For the longer term, we were tasked to develop a station and apparatus plan for the Town. This plan was done with two iterations – one to maximize ISO criteria, and another based upon a desire to maintain service levels and provide a feasible level of service assuming that existing trends in resource availability will continue. Although the current appetite for building new fire stations in Bethlehem is not strong, there are current needs that will need to be addressed over the 10 year range of this plan.

Therefore, these scenarios are useful as planning guidance and serve as a goal and endpoint for guiding discussion and deliberation in the coming years. It is important to remember that the recommendations in this section represent minimums to maintain the current level of service and day-to-day operations. Any anticipated reductions in the amount of fire apparatus maintained within the town must be made within a context of volunteer members' ability to staff this and additional apparatus, as well as a need to retain some excess capacity for extreme events such as storms, natural disasters, or other events in which additional apparatus might be desirable.

16.2.1 ISO-based Fire Station Location Plan

When reviewing the fire defense and emergency service needs of the Town of Bethlehem on a holistic level without considering fire district borders, a different arrangement of fire stations and their assigned units begins to unfold. While referencing to ISO's criteria, a more efficient distribution of stations and apparatus could be implemented producing significant savings in overall costs. The plan addresses the issue of fire station and unit distribution from a town level approach, rather than one that views each fire district independently.

Applying ISO criteria, the number of engine companies needed is based on all built-up areas of the town being no farther than 1.5 road miles from the closest engine apparatus and 2.5 miles from the closest ladder truck. Ladder trucks that are not equipped with an aerial device but meet all other equipment requirements may be all that is needed in those areas of the town where the area served does not have five or more structures that are at least three stories or 35 feet in height or where there are at least five properties with a needed fire flow greater than of 3,500 gpm or a combination of the two. Ladder trucks that are not required with an aerial device are known as "service" trucks under the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule.

Service trucks, under ISO criteria, essentially carry the same equipment as a ladder company without requiring an aerial device such as an elevating ladder or platform. ISO permits the equipment required for a service truck to be carried on more than one piece of apparatus. Given the heavy rescues and other large capacity utility vehicles operated by departments in the town,

we would expect that significant credit toward service trucks can be achieved with minimal adjustment to current equipment inventory and designation of such units for their service function.

While using these criteria, the town was reviewed in terms of the best station locations with minimum consideration for existing district facilities. Instead, an attempt has been made to strategically locate stations for optimum response time while minimizing the number of needed stations thus reducing overall cost for services. As indicated in Figure 16.1, eight fire station locations were identified. The station numbers bear no relation to district identities. The station locations would be as follows:

Table 16.1: Minimum major apparatus needs to maximize ISO ratings

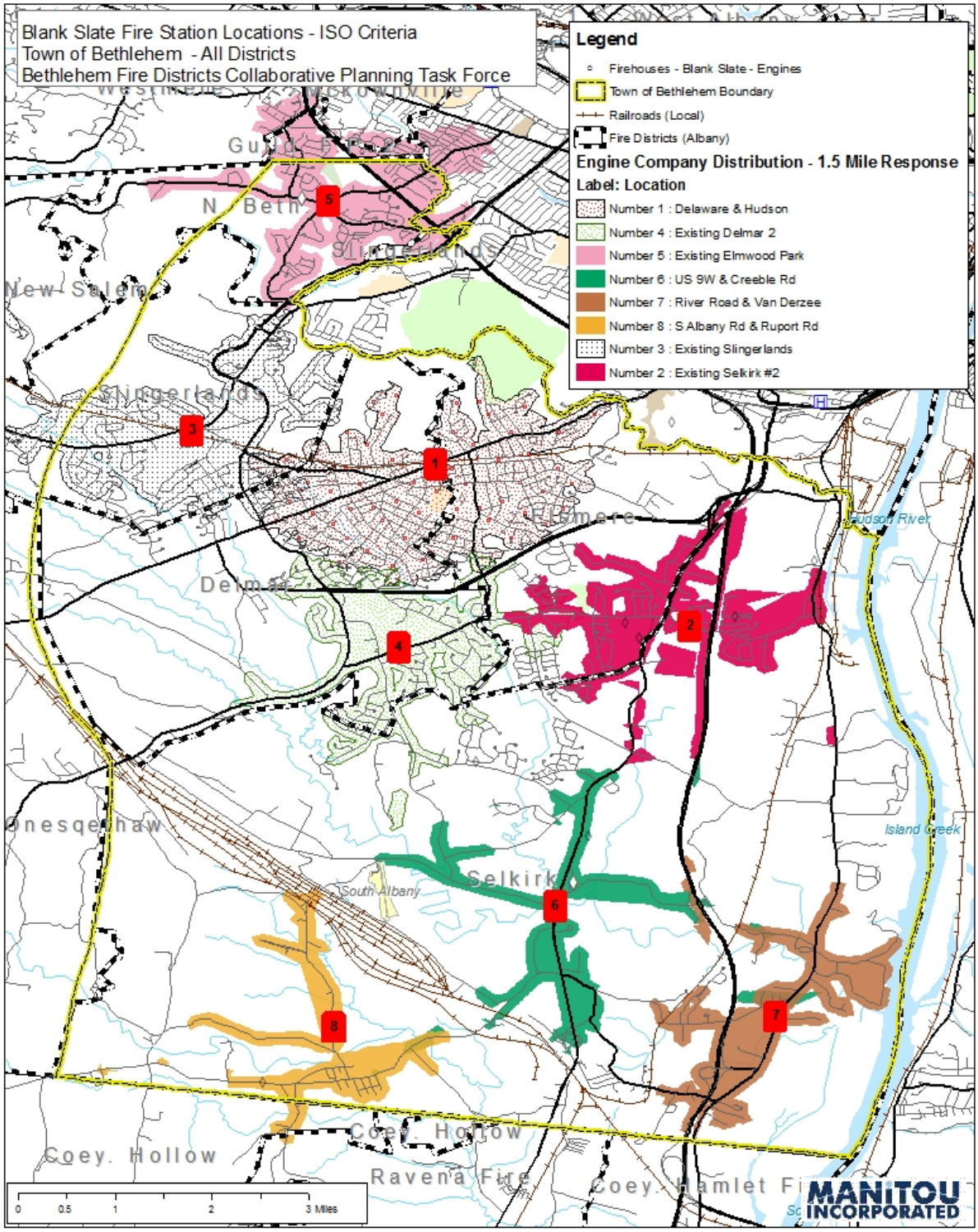
Station	Location	Front-line Engines	Reserve Engines/ Pumper Tanker	Front-line Ladder Truck	Front-line Service Truck	Reserve Ladder/ Service
1	Delaware Avenue. & Hudson Avenue	1	1	1		
2	Existing Selkirk Fire Station #2	1		1		
3	Existing Slingerlands Station	1				
4	Existing Delmar Fire Station #2	1	1			1
5	Existing Elmwood Park Fire Station	1	1*		1	
6	Creeble Road & Route 9W	1	1*		1	
7	River Road & Van Derzee	1				
8	South Albany Road & Rupert Road	1	1*			
	Total	**8**	**5**	**2**	**2**	**1**

**Pumper/Tanker*

The number of needed and type of engines and ladder trucks assigned to each station is based ISO's criteria of the minimum number and type of apparatus for an initial assignment to structure fires. The minimum number of units includes one chief officer, two engine apparatus, and one ladder truck apparatus. Each fire station would be housed with one front-line engine apparatus with fire stations 1 and 4 housing a reserve engine. ISO recommends a reserve engine for every eight needed engines or a fraction thereof. However, for a town the size of Bethlehem it is recommended that at least two reserve engines be maintained due to the potential of simultaneous fires and/or front line engine apparatus being out of service. Ladder truck service is provided by the placement of two aerial ladder trucks located at fire stations 1 and 4. In addition, where recent ISO reports have indicated a need for ladder truck service but without an aerial device, two service trucks are located at fire stations 5 and 6.

Criteria used for determining the number of reserve aerial ladder trucks needed is the same as the number of reserve engines needed. Applying these criteria, the number of reserve aerial ladder trucks needed is one. It should be remembered that what ISO defines as a reserve piece of apparatus can be used on a regular basis and would be part of the department's normal complement of equipment.

Figure 16.1: "Blank Slate" station plan according to ISO rating criteria



The location of fire station 1 indicated at Delaware and Hudson Avenue is intended to reflect the long-term need to evaluate the utilization and/or retention of the current Delmar Station #1 and the Elsmere Fire District station. From a response time standpoint, both service areas can be effectively served from a single consolidated station. However, we do not advocate that a consolidation of these facilities be undertaken in the near future. Rather, we would suggest that apparatus be spread among the two facilities. The role of Delmar Station #1 in housing Delmar EMS and its considerable assets suggests that this facility may continue to be used far into the future (see Figure 16.1).

16.2.2 Service Level-based Fire Station Location Plan

The modified plan reduces the number of fire stations from eight to six. The reduction is due to fire station 6 providing coverage for stations 7 and 8 in the recommended plan. The rationale for this approach is due to the current sparsely populated area in the southern region of the Town. Station 6 would house an engine and a service truck to serve the southern region of the Town. In the future fire stations 7 and 8 could be constructed if ever the area were to become more populated. The remaining northern stations and apparatus assignments would remain the same as in the original ISO-based station location plan. The plan is shown in Figure 16.2.

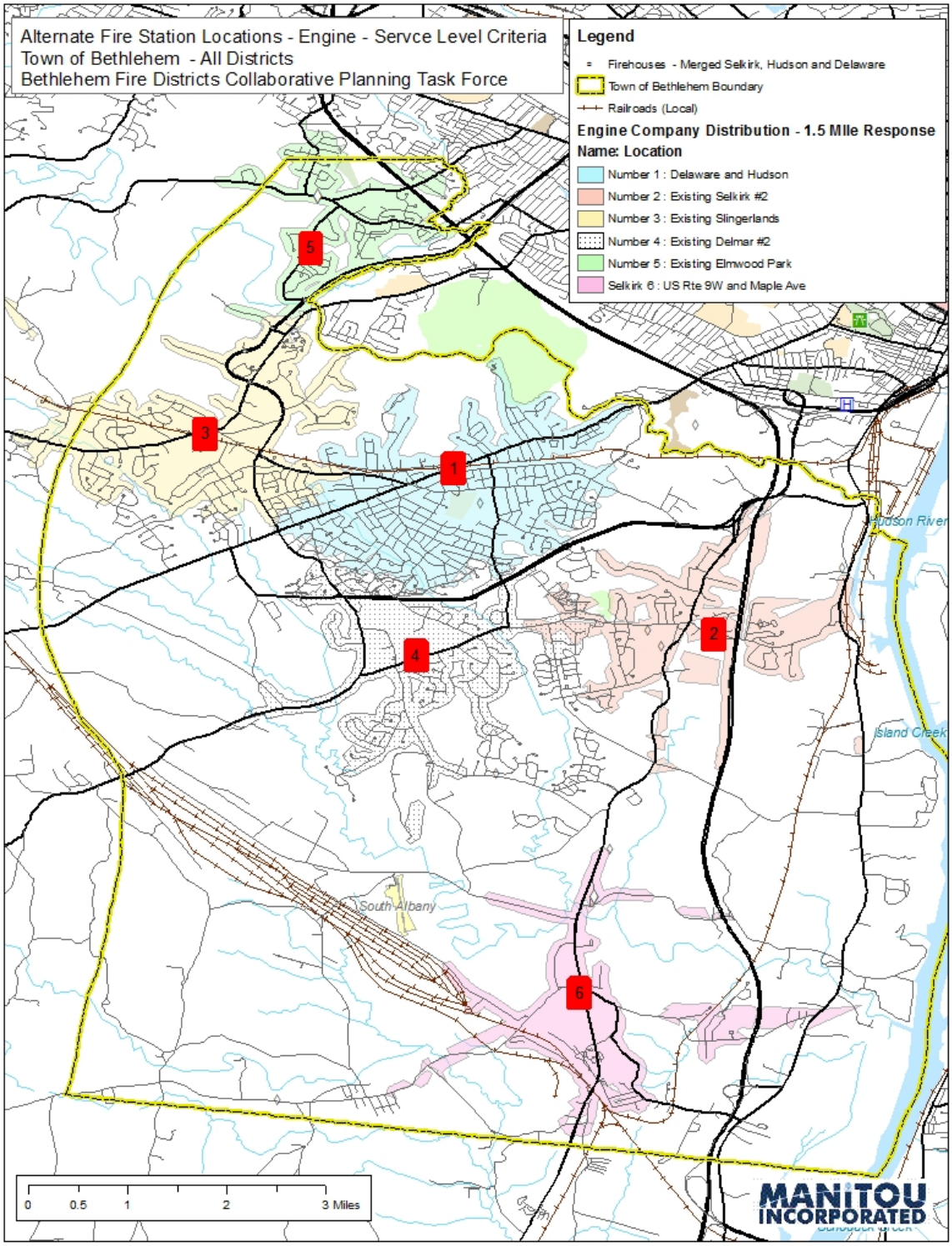
Table 16.2: Minimum apparatus needs: service level criteria

Station	Location	Front-line Engines	Reserve Engines	Front-line Ladder	Front-line Service	Reserve Ladder/ Service
1	Delaware Ave. & Hudson Ave.	1	1	1		
2	Existing Selkirk Fire Station 2	1		1		
3	Existing Slingerlands Station	1				
4	Existing Delmar Fire Station 2	1	1			1
5	Existing Elmwood Park Fire Station	1	1*		1	
6	Rt. 9W and Maple Ave	1	1*		1	
	Total	6	4	2	2	1

*Pumper/Tanker

In this plan, the stations in South Bethlehem are reduced from three stations to only one. This is a reflection of the poor location and limited membership of the current Selkirk Station #3, the limited size and marginal condition of Selkirk's Station #1, and the very limited demand for service in the area served by Selkirk's Station #3. A consolidated station at Route 9W and Maple Avenue would serve the area currently served by Selkirk Stations #1 and #3 (see Station indicated as #6 on Figure 16.2).

Figure 16.2: Service-level based station plan to meet service level criteria



16.3 Specialty Apparatus and Services

The five fire districts serving the town maintain specialized apparatus including heavy rescues, various support vehicles, brush fire units, and water supply units (tankers). ISO remains silent on these specialized units with the exception engine/tankers, which may serve as one of the needed engines based on distribution and/or fire flow criteria for engines. In order for engine/tankers to be credited under ISO as an engine apparatus, it must meet the minimum pump capacity of 750 gpm and other specifications such as hose and equipment as identified by the FSRS. The current practice of dispatching engine/tankers as part of the initial structure fire response in remote non-hydranted areas of the town should continue in the above ISO-based plans. We make recommendations based upon our analysis of current and future needs within the town. We did not explicitly address fire police units for their apparatus needs in the context of this study. Given the historical utilization of this capability and the demonstrated need for support on incidents, particularly those on the Thruway (I-87), some of this capacity should be maintained. The existing fire boat maintained by the Selkirk Fire District should also be retained. Specific functional capabilities are listed below.

Heavy Rescue
The long-standing capability and expertise in heavy rescue originated by the Slingerlands Fire District, and the subsequent expansion of this capability by the Selkirk Fire District should be maintained. From response time perspectives, there is a need for heavy rescue capabilities in both locations in order to serve the town. The importance of maintaining these specialized units at the location of their trained members is important.

Haz Mat
Although they are not high-frequency events, the potential for hazardous materials related incidents is very real given the numerous transportation facilities present in the town. Currently, the Elsmere Fire District hosts a hazardous materials decontamination unit on a rescue type truck. This unit is part of the Albany County regional hazardous materials response capability.

The Selkirk Fire District maintains a trailer mounted foam unit that carries concentrate used for generating foam for suppression of flammable and combustible liquid fires. Their proximity to the Selkirk rail yards, heavy industry, and the South Albany airfield supports the continued provision of the service.

Rehab
The fire ground rehabilitation unit currently operated by the Elmwood Park Fire District serves a unique and specialized function for the region extending beyond the town of Bethlehem. Such specialized units serve a useful purpose and are a source of pride and inspiration for their department's members. We recommend that this capability continue to be provided.

16.4 Preferred Apparatus Configuration

The reduction in apparatus should be conditioned by the numbers of volunteers consistently turning out for calls for service. That is, if a station consistently turns out more than enough personnel to staff the available apparatus, consideration should be given to increasing the

apparatus to provide opportunities for those members to participate. This preferred plan is intended to provide adequate apparatus for the ten year planning period and should be viewed as a reasonable level of apparatus.

This preferred configuration would reduce the number of fire stations from eight to six, while reducing the amount of apparatus from 16 engines down to 11, ladder companies from three to two, and utilize existing specialty apparatus to produce the benefit of three service companies.

Table 16.3: Recommended apparatus needs: service level ISO rating criteria

Station	Location	Front-line Engines	Reserve Engines	Front-line Ladder	Front-line Service	Reserve Ladder/ Service	Specialty
1	Delaware Avenue. & Hudson Avenue.	1	1	1			Haz Mat Support
2	Existing Selkirk Fire Station #2	1		1			Breathing Air Unit
3	Existing Slingerlands Station	1					Heavy Rescue
4	Existing Delmar Fire Station #2	1	1			1	
5	Existing Elmwood Park Fire Station	1	1*		1		Rehab, air, light Unit
6	Route 9W and Maple Avenue	1	2*		1		Tanker, Boat, Heavy Rescue, Fire Police, Brush Unit, Foam Unit
	Total	**6**	**5**	**2**	**2**	**1**	

**Pumper/Tanker*

16.5 Record Keeping

The integrated town-wide fire/EMS district management system would have many potential uses to support each district's management of fire and emergency services. Examples of these uses include:

- Enable efficient collection, storage, query, retrieval, management, analysis, and reporting of district activities, which would support making informed decisions based on accurate, reliable and up-to-date information.

- Support more efficient and cost-effective decision-making processes by implementing systematic methods to analyze, prioritize fire and emergency services planning, and to optimize the allocation of the limited funding and resources according to the required performance levels.

- Integrate and manage various aspects of fire apparatus and equipment and related resources by tracking and measuring life cycles and use, thus improving the efficiency of the decision-making processes.

- Enable the sharing of data across districts for various administrative and management needs.

- Increase operational efficiency by aiding in the planning, execution, budgeting, and coordination of services provided by tracking and managing the information related to deployment, firefighter recruitment and retention, certifications, budget, training, response, and procurement of apparatus and procurement of equipment.

Recommendation 16.10: All districts should implement the use of a computer-based records management system. Ideally, the systems should be of the same provider to ensure consistency of record keeping and reporting. All districts should uniformly collect and manage the same data. At a minimum, this should include records of:

- Personnel and human resource data
- NFIRS and EMS responses
- Training and education records
- Vehicle and equipment maintenance
- Inventory
- LOSAP

These systems should be interconnected with one shared main server. Savings in purchase and maintenance will occur if all districts specify the same computer hardware and software. A sharing of costs for entry of data and maintenance of this records system should occur, with a goal that one to two personnel would be proficient in the system and maintain records in a single database for each of the districts. This might also enhance controls over the LOSAP system and eligibility.

16.6 Dispatching

Dispatch protocols, including apparatus assignments and types of apparatus should be standardized across the five fire districts. In accordance with the previous section, a policy of closest station response should be implemented immediately for any high-priority call to include reported structure fires and automobile accidents with injuries.

We understand that efforts were made to standardize the programming and channel layout of radios carried by firefighters throughout the town. However, shortly after this was done, one or more districts opted to make changes on their own. This is undesirable. A common radio channel layout should be implemented throughout the town. This layout should be used for all five fire districts in consultation with neighboring jurisdictions and Albany County dispatch to ensure that interoperability will be achieved.

Recommendation 16.11: Plan to enable tracking of individual unit response times in the CAD system for the Town of Bethlehem. This data is essential to monitoring system performance.

Recommendation 16.12: In the long-term, the five districts in the Town of Bethlehem should consider moving their communications and dispatch functions to a single dispatch center. The Albany County dispatch center would be a natural location for consolidating fire dispatch functions. This center has the added attraction of providing service at no charge to the fire districts.

As stated previously, compliance with desired standards such as those of the insurance services office and NFPA 1221 are more easily met with a larger communications center then can usually be sustained by a single Township. If anticipated growth in the Albany County dispatch facility takes place, it may be possible for a new dispatch center to be constructed in which case full compliance with desired standards and capabilities would be possible.

Another concern is the adoption of next-generation 9-1-1 standards. These standards, known as NG9-1-1, are intended to move dispatch and 9-1-1 capabilities into the modern, digital age. The entire 9-1-1 infrastructure will change from a traditional analog public telephone network-based system to a fully digital IP-based. This new NG 9-1-1 system will enable mobile devices to communicate rich data and information to the 911 center. Current initiatives such as text messaging to 9-1-1 and the ability to send digital photographs from a smart phone to a 9-1-1 center are examples of the capabilities that would be enabled through NG 9-1-1. The costs of implementing this new standard will be high, and will doubtless force a hard look at the practice of maintaining multiple PSAP's within a single entity such as a county. In fact, regional systems serving multiple counties are being planned.

Any moves toward consolidation the dispatch should be accompanied by a thorough review of call volume and staffing levels based upon the most recent information to assure that adequate staff are available to handle any projected demand for service.

The ability to obtain quality, reliable data on individual unit response times is essential to sound management of the system going forward. Some limitations in this data are a function of staffing and operating policies. There are also cost issues associated with possible changes in programming of CAD systems to capture this data in meaningful form. There are technological assists available such as automated unit status buttons and mobile data terminals that can be deployed to minimize the burden on existing limited dispatch staff. This capability needs to be pursued and obtained regardless of the limitations above.

Recommendation 16.13: Evaluate current radio coverage in the Town. There are known dead spots along the Hudson River and in South Bethlehem, but also some areas where in-building coverage is not possible. Existing coverage should be compared to desired, and deficiencies should be documented for operational purposes and to identify areas for improvement.

16.7 ISO Recommendations

There are a number of ISO-related recommendations that can be made. Unfortunately, the ISO rating reports we reviewed are generally over 10 years old, and at least two districts were undergoing new ratings as the study was being completed. Nonetheless, we tentatively have identified a number of areas in which ISO ratings may be improved without requiring additional apparatus or stations, and in fact, may be maintained or improved while reducing the apparatus fleet.

As prefaced in the beginning of this document, ISO relies on proprietary guidelines to interpret their FSRS. We cannot guarantee that our recommendations will have a given effect on the PPC (rating). However, we make our recommendations based upon our best judgment and considerable experience in applying ISO requirements. Any proposed changes can be reviewed by ISO prior to implementation, so that they may offer an opinion as to the impact, if any on the community's PPC.

Another concern is that rating based on an individual district could indeed be subject to change in the event that one or more districts opt to consolidate. Functional consolidation and well-defined automatic aid can have similar positive benefits from a ratings standpoint.

See the Appendix and previous chapter for individual district recommendations. We believe that a systematic approach to the ISO ratings can enable maintenance of ratings even with a reduction (overall) in the amount of apparatus in the town.

Recommendation 16.14: Develop a formal agreement to enable sharing of reserve apparatus between the districts.

Recommendation 16.15: When updated ISO reports are available, revisit the analysis and develop a strategy for improvement building on the areas identified in this report. Once this is done, ISO can be consulted to get an opinion on the effect of changes in apparatus, and the implications of potential consolidation and/or expansion of automatic aid on the ratings.

16.8 Purchasing

The five fire districts have pursued several joint purchasing efforts. These efforts should continue, including the use of items purchased from New York State contracts through the Office of General Services. As equipment and apparatus requirements are standardized, there will be additional opportunities to develop bid documents for multiple districts at the Town or even County level. Unfortunately, very little documentation exists to show cost savings from group purchase efforts in New York fire services.

In our experience, while such efforts are worthwhile, shared services for professional services and reduced administrative costs and time are often the biggest benefits of group purchasing. Prudent specification of apparatus and reduced demand through sharing of apparatus will produce bigger savings than many of these smaller but worthwhile efforts.

16.9 Ten-Year Planning Schedule

To summarize the overall recommendations and their pace of execution, the following schedule was produced for ease of implementation. Of course, the schedule assumes that all major recommendations in this report are adopted but also reflects the choices and alternatives that are contained. Some recommendations were initiated prior to the finalization of this report and are therefore in process.

Priorities are given, reflecting the objectives in the original study's description, and indicating the "must do" from the "should do."

Table 16.4: Implementation Schedule for Major Recommendations

Major Recommendation	Priority	Notes	Timeframe
16.1 Make Task Force permanent	High		Immediate
16.5; 16.7 Implement Closest Station Response for all fire and rescue incidents (not service or carbon monoxide calls [no symptoms]).	High	Begin with Elsmere and Selkirk	Within 1 Year
Begin standardization of member requirements, starting with firefighter and moving upward in rank	High		Develop town-wide minimum requirements within 2 years
16.2 Move Toward Functional Consolidation Radio terminology and designations Helmet markings and rank designations Safety-related fireground policies All fireground policies Standardize Equipment Locations on apparatus	High		 Year 1 Year 1 Year 1 Year 2 Year 2 Year 2-3

Standardize apparatus design			
16.14 Develop agreement for sharing of apparatus between districts	High		Year 1
13.1 Increase oversight of false alarms	Medium	In conjunction with Town Building Department	Year 2
13.2 Develop code enforcement familiarization training for chief officers	Medium		Year 2
16.4 Better integrate Elmwood Park into the Town's fire services.	High		Year 1 to 2
16.15 Revisit ISO Analysis	High	Evaluate impact of consolidation on grading	Year 1 to 3
13.3; 13.4 Develop standardized pre-planning template in conjunction with Town Building Department	Medium		Year 2
16.11 Evaluate possibilities for improving tracking of individual unit response times by dispatch centers	High		Year 2-3
16.7 Evaluate need to consider a single-response policy for stations with limited staffing (during parts of the day)	High		Year 2-3
16.6 Evaluate policies to utilize Town employees to provide first response staffing in daytimes	High		Year 2-3
16.13 Conduct a radio system coverage study	Medium		Year 2-3
16.10 Implement a common shared records system	Medium		Year 2-4
16.3 Evaluate consolidation of districts	Option		Year 2-5
16.12 Consider moving dispatch function	Medium		Year 2-5

to Albany County			
16.8 Reduce Apparatus Fleet Consistent with deployment plans and facility needs	High		Year 2-10

The schedule above should be viewed as a series of guideposts for the Districts to follow to improve cooperation and efficiency in delivery of service. Given the real challenges facing them in terms of staffing, especially during the day, increased sharing of personnel and automatic aid will become more and more critical. Monitoring performance of the system with regular collection and review of data on member participation, demand for services, and response times will be crucial to informing this planning effort and maintaining legitimacy with the public.

In closing, this study should not be viewed as an end in itself, but a validation of the efforts to date by the fire districts in the Town to work together. The efforts to date have been very positive, and this report should help maintain and heighten meaningful cooperation between the districts, including candid consideration of consolidation as a means to streamline administration, reduce costs, and reflect the interdependent nature of service delivery across the Town of Bethlehem.

17.0 Appendices

A. GIS Analysis Details
B. GIS Maps
C. ISO Rating Schedule Detail
D. Member Survey Summary Form
E. Citizen Survey Summary Results
F. Supporting Documentation for Recommendations

[Appendices are in a separate volume]